

Wednesday, January 30, 2002

Duxbury Clipper

The Community Preservation Act - An Update.

By ED MCGLINCHY

At this time last year, there was a concerted community wide effort to adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in Duxbury. The CPA was approved by 68% of the voters in March 2001 and the surcharge on property taxes began in July of 2001. In June 2001, the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) was appointed to study the needs, resources and opportunities relative to community preservation and to make recommendations for town meeting approval on the use of CPA funds. The Committee appreciates the opportunity to provide an update on our activities.

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What is the CPA?

The purpose of the Community Preservation Act is to help preserve the quality of Massachusetts communities, specifically in the areas of preservation of open space, historic preservation and community housing and recreation. The CPA is flexible in allowing each community to assess their own resources, needs and opportunities and develop a specific plan for their town or city. The minimum requirement is that at least 10 percent of the funds raised each year be spent or allocated to open space, historic preservation or community housing. There will be articles at town meeting to make these allocations. Beyond that minimum 30 percent, the community decides how these moneys are to be spent.

There is a state matching program, funded with dedicated funds derived through fees at the Registry of Deeds. The state will match the communities' property surcharge at a percentage determined through a formula based upon the total community surcharges collected throughout the state. To date, 36 of the state's 351 communities have adopted the CPA. Based upon present projections, the Town of Duxbury anticipates receiving about \$825,000 or a 100% match in October of this year. That will be a 100% return on your surcharge dollar.

What will happen to the surcharges already collected?

To date, the town has collected about \$398,000 dollars that are in an interest bearing Community Preservation Fund account. These funds are not available to be spent until July 2002. In October, the town will receive the state match to be deposited into the Duxbury CPA fund. Unlike many grant

programs, state approval of a specific project is not required to get the match. CPA funds can only be spent on specific projects with the approval of the voters at town meeting.

Will the CPC be asking Town Meeting to approve many projects?

The CPC has learned that there is no shortage of opportunities for use of the CPA funds in all of the mandated categories. The CPC has also learned that it takes time to really develop, analyze and approve a good list of projects. The Committee has been very conservative to be sure that the use of the funds is well defined, is allowed under CPA criteria, that there will be controls and accountability on the expenditure of the funds and that the expenditures will bring long term value to the town. We have tried to avoid an attitude of "the money is there, spend it". The collected surcharge and the state match are not subject to a time limit and can continue to grow.

The deadline of December to identify warrant items for this March town meeting gave the CPC less than six months from its initial meeting to make decisions. It is very possible that some worthy projects may have to be considered later at a special town meeting. A few comments about each of the CPA categories.

Open space

The preservation of open space is currently and has historically been a priority in Duxbury. The preservation of the semi-rural character, the protection of our water supply, and the potential significant growth of our town are concerns. The CPC has examined the availability of and the opportunity to acquire open space.

There are a number of properties that are actively under consideration. The CPC is trying to prioritize, with the help of other town organizations, how to leverage the limited funds available to the greatest benefit. This could include purchase of land or the negotiation of a restriction on the development of land. This is not a fast process if it is done properly. Obtaining appraisals and determining land values, verifying property ownership, analyzing potential uses of the land, negotiation with the land owners, the weighing of one opportunity against another all take time. Due to the confidential nature of real estate negotiations, the specific properties under consideration are not be-

ing disclosed.

The CPC may not be ready to recommend any open space projects at this March town meeting.

Historic Preservation

Duxbury is a town with a rich history. The preservation of that history is important to our citizens and the CPA is a resource to achieve that goal. The CPC has considered three proposals in the historic preservation category. Two were from non-profit organizations. In one request, the CPC is examining whether the intended use of the funds is for preservation, which is allowed, or for the maintenance of a historic property, which is not allowed by the CPA. That proposal is still under consideration. The other request was for assistance with an ambitious, long term expansion of the resources of a non-profit that needed more definition and detail for consideration at a later time.

The CPC is currently considering a proposal to preserve the Tarkiln Community Center. The east wing of this building, built in 1871 as the Tarkiln School, is the last surviving example of the one room school house still in its original location. It is used as a community center by many groups and is the only public meeting facility in that part of town. In 2000, a consultant hired by the town concluded that the building needs extensive work to prevent further decay and to keep it fit for community use. The alternative to its preservation is to demolish the building and a piece of our history. The CPC will make a recommendation by mid February on this project and welcomes any citizen input.

Community Housing

Almost daily, there are articles in the media about the need for community housing. Community housing is defined by the CPA as "low and moderate income housing for individuals and families, including low or moderate income senior housing". Community housing is a mandated use of CPA funds. The CPC has been talking with the Duxbury Housing Authority and non-profits involved in community housing about opportunities that are available in Duxbury to increase the availability of units especially for seniors and those who work in the town. The Duxbury Housing Authority is seeking a state grant to conduct a housing needs study to quantify housing needs.

There are a number of cre-

ative possibilities under consideration, but they are not yet developed in specifics to be able to bring forth for a town meeting vote. We hope to be able to do so in the near future. The CPC would welcome any suggestions to create additional community housing that is compatible with the CPA.

The CPC did consider a request to recommend CPC funds for the purchase of a lot for a Habitat for Humanity home. That request was not recommended by the CPC, since it was not for a specific property, but for a property still to be determined.

Recreation

Some use of CPA funds for recreation is allowed, but not mandated. The main focus of the act is on the acquisition of land for recreational purchases. There have been discussions about possible land acquisition for recreation, but there is no active proposal at this time.

The CPC considered a request to recommend funds for a new playground. The Committee was concerned about the proposed location and also felt that there needed to be a specific proposal jointly presented by the town recreation department and the playground proponent.

Moving ahead.

In its first year the Community Preservation Committee has learned that its mission to study the town, its needs and resources is a major one. Going forward, the CPC will become even more proactive, continue to work with other town organizations to develop a plan for the next five years and build consensus on the direction.

The work of the Community Preservation Committee is ongoing. There are periodic cut-offs for town meeting recommendations, but the door is always open to ideas. The CPC is receptive to reconsider requests that have not been recommended for the March town meeting.

We encourage the ideas and the support of all Duxbury citizens to help us best utilize CPA funds to achieve the goals of community preservation.

Ed McGlinchey is chairman of the Duxbury Community Preservation Committee. Other members are: Board of Selectmen Appointee D i a n e Bartlett, Duxbury Housing Authority; Jody Hall, Historical Commission; Holly Morris, Open Space and Recreation Committee; Art Vautrain, Conservation Commission; George Wadsworth, Planning Board; Jon Witten, Board of Selectmen Appointee